COMPASS

# GUIDELINES & TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED MONITORING

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COMPASS

Community Partnerships for Sustainable Resource Management in Malawi

# Guidelines and Tools for Community-based Monitoring


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# BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

## Purpose of COMPASS

Community Partnerships for Sustainable Resource Management (COMPASS) Activity is a partnership promoting increased sustainable use, conservation, and management of renewable natural resources. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supports the Malawi-based organization, Development Management Associates (DMA) and the United States-based organization, Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI) in this effort. Part of the COMPASS initiative focuses on the Small Grants Program.

## Small Grants Program

The COMPASS Small Grants Program was established to finance and test innovative community based natural resource management (CBNRM) models. Because of the emphasis on innovation, it is particularly important that grant recipients develop and implement an appropriate monitoring process to assess performance and impact. COMPASS's approach to ensuring active stakeholder participation in performance monitoring of grant activities is to assist grantees in identifying your own targets and appropriate indicators to measure progress. These guidelines are part of the assistance that COMPASS will provide you.

The Small Grants Program builds upon existing capacities, or "assets" within non-government organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) and communities. It focuses on and seeks to develop the abilities of these groups to design, implement, and monitor your own small grant projects.

COMPASS intends for participatory monitoring of the small grants to be investigative and educational. When done well such monitoring will provide you valuable information that will enable improvement of your grant-related work. In turn, COMPASS will learn what works best, based on your experience and monitoring data, so that COMPASS can help to replicate the most successful activities. COMPASS also intends to develop ways to help grantees avoid or correct common weaknesses or mistakes that have been identified elsewhere and successfully rectified. In other words, COMPASS encourages a learning approach that seeks to turn a range of experience - successful and not so successful - into knowledge that can be actively shared and incorporated into similar ventures.

## KEY DEFINITIONS

**Baseline Data –** Information related to the objectives collected early to describe the "now" against which future change could be measured or demonstrated.

**Capacity Building** – An approach to development that aims to strengthen fundamental and technical skills within a group or organization to increase effectiveness and sustainability.

**Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) –** An approach to the user of renewable natural resources that relies on the empowerment of community groups to use those resources as they see fit using strategies arrived at through consensus. In an ideal situation, the use of the resources is sustainable in economic and ecological terms and the distribution of benefits occurs in a socially equitable manner.

**Community-based Organization (CBO) –** Groups of individuals within a village or group of villages or residential areas with similar vested interests that have established an agreement to work together in a structured manner to achieve common objectives.

**Data Analysis –** Studying and interpreting data – sorting it out, adding it up, comparing it. Trying to understand the meaning behind the data. Asking, "what does this tell us?"

**Data Collection –** Using various methods to collect information in order to learn about something.

**Data Use –** Following data analysis, deciding how to utilize the new insights or learning that the data has revealed.

**Disaggregated Data –** Data that has been divided up into groups or categories. For example, data disaggregated by sex has been divided into information related to males and information related to females. If data is disaggregated by location, then information pertaining to a particular location is put together.

**Indicator –** An objectively measurable gauge of progress toward achieving an objective or measuring the impact of a specific intervention. Specifically, performance indicators evidence degree of progress in completing proposed project activities. Impact indicators help to show degree of success in institutional capacity building, information exchange, knowledge, transfer, policy reform, and income generation from environmentally sustainable practices.

**Insiders –** Those who are an integral part of a system. In the case of a community, the community members would be "insiders" where donors and possibly NGOs could be considered outsiders.

**Goal –** A broad statement of what the activity hopes to achieve.

**Grant –** Financial assistance provided, not as a loan, for implementation of viable natural resource management proposals.

**Learning –** The process of transforming knowledge into meaning, usually demonstrated by changes in attitudes, practices, and/or skills.

**Objectives –** Specific, measurable, appropriate, realistic, and timebound statements describing what the project hopes to accomplish. Objectives do not say how, just what.

**Participatory Monitoring** – A management and learning approach that helps to ensure active stakeholder and beneficiary involvement in identifying targets, appropriate indicators, data collection procedures, analysis, and use.

**Service Provider –** An agency providing managerial and technical assistance to a community in a process of building the capacity of the community to become self-reliant.

**Stakeholder** – Individuals, communities, non-governmental organizations, private organizations, parastatals, government agencies, financiers and others having an interest or a "stake" in a project or activity and its outcome.

**Sustainable Development** – Progress measured in social or economic terms (or both) that has been or will be accomplished without irreversible environmental degradation or social disruption. The benefits should not only outweigh the social and ecological costs but should also be founded on a rational use of resources (human and natural) that can be maintained indefinitely or perpetuated based on future conditions that can be reasonabley anticipated.

**Target** – The specific measure to be achieved.

# PURPOSE OF GUIDELINES

COMPASS advocates a participatory community-based monitoring approach. These guidelines outline a process and provide tools to help you to monitor your own grants and learn about effective CBNRM.

## DEVELOPMENT OF GUIDELINES

The process of Guidelines development included interviewing key informants from selected organizations, drafting Guidelines, facilitating an experiential workshop for Guidelines review and revision, and revision of the initial version into this "working draft" to be distributed to and further tested by small grants recipients.

### Scope and Limitations of the Guidelines

***The Guidelines DO***

- provide a participatory process with which small grants recipients can work with community groups to develop a participatory system to monitor their grant activities.
- recommend tools and techniques to increase key stakeholder involvement in clarifying goals and objectives, selecting indicators, forming a baseline, collecting data, analyzing and using monitoring data for management decisions.
- suggest helpful references for further reading, tool and process development.

***The Guidelines DO NOT***

- provide guidance with initial community assessment activities to identify project purpose and focus.
- explicitly state *who* should monitor *what* and *when* because these decisions must be part of a participatory process of a tailored monitoring system.
- dictate a blueprint process, but provides tools for designing and tailoring.

### Intended Users

The Guidelines have been developed for small grant recipients such as non-government organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and public and private sector groups.

### Interviews

The COMPASS consultant interviewed 15 persons in 11 government and non-government organizations in Malawi in the process of drafting the Guidelines. The purpose of these interviews was to learn of organizations' experience with participatory monitoring of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) to better enable COMPASS to advocate successful models and increase awareness of potential pitfalls.

This interview process was not intended to be a thorough countrywide research undertaking. Most of the organizations contacted are based in Blantyre with staff available for interviews during the few days prior to the workshop scheduled to review the Guidelines.
These individuals generously shared their experiences with monitoring of community-based natural resource management. Their comments and ideas related to the following

suggestions. More detailed content from the interviews is interwoven throughout the Guidelines. Attachment One contains a listing of organizations and individuals contacted.

- Involve community groups from the onset.
- Active community participation has many benefits.
- Participatory monitoring for CBNRM should be simple, efficient and focused.
- Tailor monitoring – don't use a blueprint approach.
- Use a range of methods to involve communities.
- Support and technical assistance will be needed to build capacity

**Drafting the Guidelines**

Draft Guidelines were then developed utilizing the consultant's experience in participatory monitoring and community-based natural resource management, lessons learned from persons interviewed, and reviewing available materials. COMPASS staff then reviewed and suggested revisions to the draft Guidelines before distribution to workshop participants for their review and comment.

**Workshop**

Twenty-seven persons (17 men and 10 women), including five COMPASS team members, participated in a 1.5-day workshop to review and "experience" the Guidelines. Participants read the Guidelines then participated in activities related to the steps of the proposed monitoring process. They then provided written feedback – noting most useful aspects and suggesting changes – on each section of the Guidelines (each step of the process). Their comments provided valuable input into revising the first draft. Attachment Two contains a list of workshop participants.

# WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY-BASED MONITORING?

Participatory community-based monitoring of small grant activities in the COMPASS project is a learning process to enable you know if you are on track; if you are headed where you intended to go. Through your own monitoring efforts you will learn whether predicted, and unpredicted, changes have occurred.

Monitoring…

- Identifies what has changed and what is needed through an ongoing process.
- Is a management tool that provides you with information needed to make decisions.
- Enables you to identify what's working well and what isn't early on so you can replicate successful actions and seek solutions for difficulties before it's too late.
- Helps to ensure effective use of resources.
- Provides an ongoing picture of the activity.
- Promotes community/group ownership of the project activity.
- Contributes to sustainability and builds capacity.
- Results in individual and group learning.
- Enables transfer of learning to other situations.

In summary, participatory monitoring is a learning process providing you, project implementers, with information you need to make wise, well-informed decisions related to progress toward your objectives.

**Why is it needed?**

Participatory monitoring serves two major functions in the COMPASS project. First, community-based participatory monitoring provides information to help you make local management decisions. Secondly, part of the purpose of COMPASS is to test innovative, alternative, non-traditional approaches to CBNRM. Monitoring is essential to learning what works best under what circumstances.

**How is it different?**

Participatory monitoring differs from traditional monitoring in that the group receiving the grant, not the donor…

Decides on objectives
Chooses indicators
Determines the baseline
Sets targets
Collects and analyzes data
Make decisions about how to use the monitoring data

# PROPOSED PROCESS

The participatory approach COMPASS proposes provides you with a process and tools to help answer the following questions:

**What's our purpose?**
(Clarifying project goal and objectives)
**What types of information will tell us how we are doing?**
(Choosing indicators, targets, and determining a baseline)
**What does the information tell us?**
(Collecting data)
**What have we learned?**
(Analyzing data)
**What changes should we make?**
(Applying the learning – use)

## Before You Get Started

The following general suggestions may help you and your group to plan and implement community-based monitoring of your COMPASS grant.

***Be sure to…***

- Involve stakeholders in all phases of monitoring – setting objectives, determining indicators, reviewing community group's assets or strengths, deciding on data collection processes and setting schedules.
- Be open to and looking for the unexpected changes – the unanticipated event.
- Build on indigenous knowledge – how do communities traditionally "monitor." What types of monitoring do you and the communities in which you work already do or know how to do?
- Do what needs to be done to gain respect and reach those you want to reach.
- Organize regular transparent discussion/dialogue between community and service provider to build trust, confidence, and project ownership.
- Cultivate a "learning attitude" in you and the individuals and organizations with which you work. Such attitudes are essential for effective participatory community-based monitoring.
- Develop outsiders' roles as facilitators, not implementers.
- Be patient. Helping your group to fully understand your situations, resources, and best actions will take time.

## When Selecting Tools

- Build upon skills and tools your group already possesses.
- Carefully select appropriate tools.
- Build upon indigenous knowledge.
- Double up with other data collection processes.
- Go with simple, not complex, approaches.
- Adapt tools and processes to suit your situation.
- Create and use your own tools. Those included here are just suggestions.

**When Planning for Monitoring**

- Creating a simple worksheet with the following headings can help you and your group to plan and keep track of your participatory monitoring activities:

| OBJECTIVES | INDICATORS | HOW TO MEASURE | BASELINE DATA NEEDED | FREQUENCY | WHO | HOW WILL USE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

**Are You Ready for Monitoring? – An Important Assumption**

- As mentioned previously, these guidelines assume that you have already worked with your group in some sort of assessment process resulting in identification of the small grant project goal. The Guidelines assume the planning process has already begun. The Guidelines assume that the key community stakeholders group has met, identified other key stakeholders, assessed resources, and identified a focus for their project activities.

  Therefore the monitoring process recommended in these guidelines begins with a review of the small grant project goal and objectives. It does not begin with a community assessment. If you have not involved others in deciding the goal and objectives, you should do that before going any further. Monitoring should be a part of a broader planning process.

**Is Community and NGO Capacity Sufficient?**

- Some community capacity building, particularly related to planning and data collection, might be required. NGOs may need capacity building in terms of attitudes and participatory skills needed to work with communities on basic planning and monitoring skills. Consider the need for these skills before you are faced with situations requiring additional understanding or skills.

**What about Performance and Impact?**

- When monitoring your project activities you and your group should consider the performance of the project – are things going as planned – if yes, "Why?" and if not, "Why not?" Your group should also be looking for impacts that may occur beyond the actual scope of your project yet have been influenced by your project.

## INVOLVING SMALL GRANTS RECIPIENTS IN MONITORING

This section outlines the major steps in the suggested process. Each step includes the following parts:

**Definition and Introduction**

Definitions and introductions provide background and key elements of the step.

**Ideas for Process and Tools**

This section in each step provides short descriptions of group activities, worksheets, and other tools designed to increase key stakeholder involvement.

**Key Questions**

These questions may stimulate your thinking and help you to recall something you may have overlooked. You may also want to include them as part of group discussions related to the particular steps.

**Be Careful…**

These pointers may help you to avoid some common mistakes.

**Helpful References**

Attachment Three contains a selection of helpful resources.

A QUICK OVERVIEW:

**STEP ONE: Clarifying Small Grant Goal and Objectives**

This step encourages you and your group to revisit and clarify your project goal and objective. This is a time to ask:

- Is our goal related to the conservation of natural resources?
- Is at least one objective related to conservation?
- How did we come up with this goal and objectives?
- Do we have a plan? What is it? Who has bought into it?"
- What might be the impact of this project on men? Women? Other key stakeholders?

**STEP TWO: Determining Indicators**

Having clarified the small grant project goal and objectives, you and your group should now decide how you will gauge progress toward the project objectives. Indicators will also help your group to determine to what extent its work has made an impact on helping to conserve natural resources. This is a time to ask:

- ♦ How will we know we are on track?
- ♦ What are the most important things we will need to know about our project progress?
- ♦ What decisions will we have to make during the project?
- ♦ What information will we need to make those decisions?
- ♦ Who needs what kind of information?
- ♦ What information will be available?

**STEP THREE: Developing a Baseline**

Once you and your group are clear on objectives and indicators, it's important to form a "baseline" – a starting point against which you can measure change. Collecting some simple baseline data will help you know, in the future, just how much difference your efforts have made. This is a time to ask:

- ♦ What is the situation at the beginning?
- ♦ How will we be able to know how far we have come, what has changed, and how much?
- ♦ What is the least we need to know about the situation now?
- ♦ How can we keep from collecting too much data?

**STEP FOUR: Collecting Data**

Before you actually start your project you should plan for how you will collect data. You shouldn't wait until you need the information to figure out how to get it.
This is the time to ask:

- ♦ Who will collect what data?
- ♦ What skills might be needed to collect it?
- ♦ Where will we get it – what are our data sources?
- ♦ How much time will it take?
- ♦ When must we collect data?

**STEP FIVE: Analyzing Data and Making Decisions about Its Use**

Merely collecting data is a waste of time. But by studying it and interpreting it – seeking meaning – you and your group can develop greater understanding and learning. You can then apply this new insight to project management by making better informed project decisions. When planning for data analysis, be sure to ask yourselves:

- ♦ Where and when will certain monitoring results be needed?
- ♦ How will we know what to analyze and when?
- ♦ How can we present data to increase its likelihood of being used?
- ♦ Who should analyze and use data?
- ♦ How can we ensure that the results will be used?

# STEP ONE

# CLARIFYING PURPOSE AND SETTING OBJECTIVES

***GOAL:***

*A broad statement of what the activity hopes to achieve. A goal tells where your project is aiming to have the greatest impact.*

***OBJECTIVES:***

*Objectives are specific, measurable, appropriate, realistic, and timebound (and timely) statements describing what the project hopes to accomplish. Objectives do not say how the objectives-related tasks will be done, just what and when. Collective achievement of objectives should lead to achieving the goal.*

***Whose goal is it?***

Key stakeholders involved should understand and agree to the purpose, or main goal, of the activity. If the idea is imposed from "outside," community members who are part of the project group must, at the very least, sincerely buy in to the idea. The new project should grow out of the community's assets and resources. The actual process of assessing the community's resources may help to identify the purpose and objectives.

Buying in to ideas does not necessarily mean complete agreement. Try, through discussions, to clarify, revise, and adapt ideas so that most key stakeholders understand and can "live with" the main goal and objectives. You should strive for clarity, understanding, and acceptance, if not complete agreement. The participatory monitoring plan should then be tailored to the organization/project/group and what it is trying to do. Monitoring should be directly linked to the project plan.

***What's a good objective?***

The same key stakeholders who have developed the goal and objectives should help to develop the objectives, too. Or at least they should buy in to them. The objectives should be SMARTT:

| | |
|---|---|
| **S**pecific: | The objective should clearly state what will happen. |
| **M**easurable: | The objective should state *how many, how much, how far,* etc. so it can be measured. |
| **A**ppropriate: | The objective should "fit" the situation. It should be linked to and help to achieve the goal. |
| **R**ealistic: | The objective should describe something that could possibly happen. |
| **T**imebound: | The objective should state a time frame – describe how long it will take to do something. |
| **T**imely: | The objective should also be relevant and important at this point in time. |

***Is this the time for gender analysis?***

This is also a good time to do a gender analysis to determine the project activities' potential impact on women, men, family life, and community. Using a simple tool like the Gender Analysis Matrix (from Parker, 1993) will help you to better understand the pros and cons of your project.

## PROCESS & TOOLS

You could use a combination of the following participatory activities with your group to clarify your project's purpose and set objectives. You should definitely develop a simple planning worksheet to keep track of your monitoring activities.

- **Planning Worksheet**

  A planning sheet listing the project goal and objectives with space for adding indicators, baseline information, data collection methods, results, and ideas for change will help you and your group to keep track of your monitoring activities. (See page 7 of this manual for a sample).

- **Writing SMART objectives**

  This activity could include large and small group activities to practice writing objectives which are Specific, Measurable, Appropriate, Realistic, and Timely. Start with people trying to write objectives for their own lives. The activity should lead to writing objectives for the small grant activity.

- **Gender Analysis**

  Through using the Gender Analysis Matrix (GAM), you and your group can determine differing effects of project activities in terms of labor, time, resources, and culture on men and women. The GAM should be used periodically as a monitoring tool following this initial time.

- **Objectives Tree or Project Map**

  This activity involves drawing a branching "tree" to show a causal, "if-then" linking of project activities. A Project Map shows an "if-then" relationship linking objectives and project activities (similar to objectives tree).

- **5+1 friends of planning (why, what, who, how, when, where)**

  This activity examines the following questions that illustrate the link between planning and monitoring. It encourages stakeholders to remember the key steps of planning. It is easy for illiterate groups to remember because can use fingers to help recall the planning words.

  WHY? Are we being true to our purpose?<br>
  If not, why? What action should we take?

WHAT? Are we doing what we thought we would be doing – what we planned?
If not, why? What action should we take?
WHO? Who's involved (who we thought would be)?
If not, why? What action should we take?
HOW? Are we able to use the methods or processes we intended or planned?
If not, why? What action should we take?
WHEN? Are we on schedule?
If not, why? What action should we take?
WHERE? Are we working where we thought we would?
If not, why? What action should we take?

- **Resource and Assets Map**

  In this activity group members draw illustrative "maps" to identify existing community resources that could clarify the purpose of the activity and to identify resources that could help with monitoring. You can use elements from the environment (leaves, grass, sticks) to build your map. Or, you can use paper, markers, and pencils.

## Key Questions

- Is this project idea imposed or does it come from within and reflect real interests and needs of the group/community?
- What key stakeholders have had input into deciding the purpose and objectives of this project?
- Does our proposed project build upon the strengths (assets and resources) within our community or organization?
- What new skills might be needed?
- What are "necessary conditions" (essential factors or resources) for us to proceed and succeed? What are the most important "necessary conditions?" Do these conditions exist within our community or could we obtain them?

## Be careful of…

- Assuming key stakeholders are in agreement…check it out.
- Rushing ahead before there is a good foundation of support from key stakeholders.
- Assuming you know the potential impact on others. Confirm this by doing a simple gender, family, and community impact analysis.

# STEP TWO

# DETERMINING INDICATORS

***INDICATORS:***

*Indicators are measures of progress and change related to project objectives.*

***Why are they needed?***

The overall COMPASS project has targets and indicators. But within the small grant part of the project, you and your stakeholders must set your own. You are the best ones to decide what you need to know, who has it, and how you can get it efficiently.

***How many?***

When deciding on indicators, remember that it is better to have 2-3 indicators and collect a small amount of useful data that everyone understands, than collect larger amount of complex data that the project may never use. If possible, plan to collect quantitative and qualitative data.

***What are targets?***

Indicators need targets because indicators are neutral statements. The targets state the specific measure to be achieved. The target states how many, how often, etc. These targets should be clear and realistic. It's good to stretch and challenge, but don't be overly ambitious. After all, it's OK to exceed your targets!

***Who should select indicators?***

Community groups directly involved with the small grant activities should decide which indicators would best help them determine progress. If an NGO has been working with a group already, and over a long period of time, the indicators selected by the community may be similar to what the NGO would choose. But the NGO should not choose the indicators for the community.

***What's a good indicator?***

Some indicators are better than others. Use the following checklist to test indicator quality; to tell whether or not something is "good indicator."

- ✓ **Appropriate** – Does it provide information your group needs to make decisions?
- ✓ **Owned by key stakeholders** – Did key stakeholders select the indicator?
- ✓ **Low Cost –** Can your group afford (in time and money) to collect the data?
- ✓ **Few in Number –** Remember, having a few indicators your project will actually monitor is much better than having many that are ignored.
- ✓ **Clear** – Is it obvious what the indicator is measuring?
- ✓ **Easily measured –** Will your group be able to easily get the information?
- ✓ **Neutral –** Does it have hidden, or multiple meanings?

- ✓ **Based on Existing Data –** Is this information already being collected by someone else?
- ✓ **Readily Observable –** Is it easy to see or understand?
- ✓ **Important** – Are you measuring something that matters?

## PROCESS & TOOLS

Choose two or three activities to help your group identify key indicators. If your group is non-literate, you may want to choose activities such as the before and after mural which avoid written words. "What if" would also work with non-literate groups if there were someone who could prepare and read the cards.

- **Determining Indicators**

  Through large and small group work, participants practice writing indicators and setting targets and eventually develop indicators for your own project.

- **"What if" Cards**

  On index cards, highlight different situations that might occur during the project. Then discuss how monitoring (having the right indicator) could alert group to problem before it becomes too big.

- **Before and After Mural**

  In this activity the group can create their idea of a "before and after" mural which will depict key changes that could result from project activities. Visualizing project results in this way will help you and your group to develop indicators related to these key changes.

- **Group Meeting**

  You could begin the process of selecting indicators by using a guided large group discussion (with small groups, too, if the large group has fifteen or more people) to discuss the Key Questions listed below.

- **Individual interviews**

  Meeting one-on-one with key stakeholders to discuss Key Questions or follow-up with persons not at the larger group meetings can help to clarify the process of setting indicators. Meeting with individuals may help to surface questions and concerns that would not necessarily come out in group meetings.

## Key Questions

- What information will we need along the way to know if we're succeeding?

- What must we know about the progress of the project in order to make changes if needed along the way?

- Do our targets explain how many, how much, to what degree, what quality (etc.), by when?

## Be careful of…

- Choosing too many indicators then getting overwhelmed by trying to measure them all.

- Making the process more complex than it needs to be.

- Forgetting to involve some key stakeholders in selecting indicators.

# STEP THREE

# DEVELOPING A BASELINE

***BASELINE:***

*Baseline data is information related to the indicators collected early to describe the "now" against which future change could be measured or demonstrated.*

***What is it?***

A good baseline provides a starting point against which to measure progress. Without it, you may not know ***what*** has changed ***when*** by ***how much.*** A participatory baseline provides the insiders' perspectives on the current status of a particular situation as it relates to the objectives, and particularly the indicators, of the activity. Baseline data enables communities to easily see change over time. Don't just rely on your memory. Collect some data, make a picture, take a photo – whatever is most appropriate in your situation – to help you remember where you started. Because baseline data is linked to the indicators, it can help to tell you if your group can easily collect the data you will need in the future.

***Who should do it?***

Key stakeholders should plan and conduct the baseline data collection. In the case of the small grants activities, the local group that will be most directly involved with the project activities should do the baseline planning and data collection. They should also "keep the data" safely for later comparison with monitoring data collected throughout the project.

***When should it happen?***

Baseline data should be collected before actual project activities begin to provide a "picture" of the current situation. You can then measure change brought about by project activities by comparing monitoring data to baseline data.

## PROCESS & TOOLS

Any tool or process that provides an accurate "picture" or description of the situation before the project or activity began will help to provide the baseline. Choose from the following activities and use those that are most appropriate for your situation.

- **Transect**

  community to examine, map and discuss a sample of ecological, production and socially stratified zones of a community. The focus should be on information related to your indicators. The process will help to highlight resources, constraints, and provide a baseline. You could do this before project activities begin or at the onset of activities.

- **Mural**

    Key stakeholders could develop a mural – a big picture – illustrating the situation at the onset of project activities. They could then compare this mural to the changing situation as the project progresses.

- **Story**

    Key stakeholders could develop a story describing the "now" conditions at the beginning of the activities. It could contain humor, drama, or anything else to make it lively and interesting – but also accurate. This would be good with non-literate groups and with groups with a strong oral history.

- **Photos**

    If the group has access to a camera and film, they could take photos of the "now" situation. These photos could then be compared with monitoring photos taken as the project develops. This approach would also work well with non-literate groups.

- **Modified Seasonal Calendar**

    Your community group could develop a calendar illustrating factors related to your indicators (frequency, prevalence, etc.) at the onset of project activities then compare this information with monitoring data collected and recorded on the seasonal calendar later on.

- **Institutional Map**

    Your community group could draw a "map" showing strength of relationships and interaction among organizations, institutions, groups, and/or individuals at the beginning of project activities, then make new ones throughout to show changes. This activity would work well if your project activities are related to changing institutions or organizations.

- **Resources Map**

    Engaging your community group in developing a resources map at the onset of your project can serve at least two purposes. First, it will provide baseline information if your project is related to resource use. Secondly, it provides your group with valuable information about the resources available to it for project activities. The resources could include natural, manmade, and human.

- **Group Discussions**

    The community group can engage in one or more group discussions to describe the current situation (in relationship to indicators). The group will need to make some record – written or taped – of these discussions for later referral.

- **Semi-Structured Interviews**

  The community group could come up with a few key questions and then interview a sample of persons in the community. If you choose this method, make sure the community members conducting the interviews have the needed interviewing skills. Also these interviews would have to be recorded (written or taped) and summarized.

- **Role Plays**

  Community group members could develop and perform a role-play (if this is something that is culturally enjoyable and acceptable) depicting perceptions of current situation. Again, there should be some record of this that could last over time. Other role-plays could be developed over time as the project progresses.

## Key Questions

- Where are we now (at the onset of project activity) in terms of the target of this project/activity?

- What information do we need at the beginning to enable us to measure our progress later on?

- What is the most important information we will need to make the project decisions we will need to make? How can we ensure that our baseline will help us to have the information we will need?

- Does everyone involved understand the importance of a clear and accurate baseline?

## Be careful of…

➢ Forgetting to collect baseline data!

➢ Forgetting to use your baseline data (keep it in a safe place).

➢ Collecting too much baseline information. Remember that it should be linked to your indicators.

# STEP FOUR

# COLLECTING DATA

***DATA COLLECTION:***

*Periodic collection of focused information related to indicators that will provide information needed to make management decisions related to the project.*

***What should we collect?***

Data should be limited, targeted, and gender disaggregated. Work with your group to distinguish between "need to know" and "nice to know." Ask WHO needs WHAT information for WHAT reason? If no one needs it or will use it, don't collect it. Be sure to document what's working and what's not. Project implementers often learn more from what did not go as planned than they do from successes. If we succeed, we often celebrate and move on. But if we stumble, we stop to try to figure out what went wrong – or at least we should.

***What methods are best?***

The best ones are the ones that best fit your situation. Methods should be linked to indicators. First decide what information you think you will need to effectively monitor your indicators, then decide what data collection tools or methods would best get at that information. Your key stakeholders may have good ideas about which methods of data collection might yield the most accurate and relevant data.

Consider using a mix of data collection techniques to get more accurate data. Also build upon existing forms of contact rather than creating new systems whenever possible. Double up when you can with data being collected for another purpose.

***Who should do it?***

Again, as in all other steps in the participatory monitoring process, key community stakeholders should collect the data.

***When should we collect data?***

Carefully schedule data collection and analysis so that you have needed information prior to the time that it's needed for making crucial decisions. If you get monitoring data too late to make needed changes, it will be useless for you.

Plan for periodic data collection, and also make sure your project group meets regularly (weekly or monthly, and at crucial decision-making points) to summarize information, celebrate achievements, and make needed corrections or changes. Such discussions will also begin to move your group from mere data collection to analysis: the next step.

***Should we disaggregate data at this point?***

Yes, during data collection it's important to disaggregate your data – separate the data into groups. Only you and your group can decide what your categories should be. But you should at least disaggregate, or separate and cluster information, by sex. There may be other categories that you want to be able to analyze separately, too. It depends on your project. Disaggregate data according to other variables that may be significant such as site (in a multi-site project), age, single-headed households, landowners, etc.

## PROCESS & TOOLS

Many data collection tools for monitoring are available. To be most effective you might want to combine tools. Notice that some tools are more appropriate for a literate population while others will be needed for non-literate groups.

Refer back to the activities suggested for conducting a baseline. If you used one approach for your baseline, a community transect for example, you might want to repeat that activity periodically to determine what has changed. Have the same people repeat the process, too, if possible. In this way you are replicating the original process as closely as possible which will help to increase the accuracy of your comparisons.

- **Planning Worksheet**

  Using a planning worksheet such as the one described on page 7 of this manual will help you and your group to plan your data collection process at the beginning of your project. Such a worksheet could include sections indicating information needed, where to find it tools to be used, by whom, etc.

- **Log Books**

  Simple record books kept in the local language can provide valuable information for you and your group and also reinforce awareness that your group or community, not the donor, owns the data.

- **Farmers' Own Record Books**

  These record books would be similar to a community logbook, but they are kept by an individual and shared with the group when needed. These may be appropriate for some types of projects.

- **Pictures or Drawings**

  This activity is similar to the Mural mentioned in the baseline section of this manual. Community members make pictures or drawings showing change over time. They can then keep these drawings as part of their records. This is a good tool for non-literate groups.

- **Observation**

  This sounds easy but it only works well if you are systematic. Be clear about what you are looking for and have a way of accurately recording and interpreting your observations.

- **Stones in a Can**

  Adding stones to a can every time something happens can help group members to track the frequency of an event. This is another technique that works well with non-literate groups.

- **Dialogue (one-to-one or group)**

  Community members could interview each other and also make exchange visits to other communities and interview people there.

  Group exchange of information – formal or informal – provide excellent opportunities to share information, exchange ideas, and form networks.

- **Focus groups**

  A focus group is a semi-structured facilitated discussing. It's another form of group dialogue that you may want to consider. Focus groups work best, as their name implies, when you and your group want to collect some focused, specific information. You would use the same questions and approaches for each focus group discussion.

- **Role-plays**

  Community members can role-play various data collection approaches to help determine strengths and weaknesses of a particular situation and data collection needs. They can also use role-plays to practice data collection methods such as interviews.

## Key Questions

- What's the best (most cost-effective, accurate, sensitive) way to get the information you need to make decisions?

- Who will collect what data? Do they have the skills they need? Do they have the time? Will they have the time when the data needs to be collected? Consider your other seasonal and family responsibilities. Data collection could be a part of someone's ongoing job or a community member might, for example, receive seedlings from a nursery in compensation for her or his time.

- Are our methods appropriate? Will they most efficiently help us to gain the information we need to measure progress toward our objectives?

- Are we using more than one data collection in order to increase the accuracy of our data?

## Be careful of…

- Choosing a method because you know how to use it, you like it, or it seems easy. Methods should be chosen because they are appropriate.

- Losing focus and collecting too much data.

- Forgetting that different indicators will require different reporting schedules. The same time won't suit all.

- Forgetting to record observations. Memories can fail!

- Overlooking seasonal responsibilities, family responsibilities, and community events when planning for data collection.

## STEP FIVE

## ANALYZING DATA AND MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT ITS USE

*DATA ANALYSIS AND USE:*

*Studying the results of data collection to determine what has been learned and how this new learning should be applied to the project activity. "Use" means asking what action should be taken?*

***Why analyze?***

Data that has only been collected but not studied – analyzed or interpreted – has little value. Data that is analyzed but not used to strengthen project management and performance is also of little use. Only through trying to understand what it means – what it can teach us, how we can use it—does it become valuable. Such data can be useful in documenting benefits of the activity, alerting your group to potential future problems, enabling your group to recommend action, and helping you to set targets for the next season or project phase.

***How can we do it?***

Just as there are a variety of ways to collect data and you should choose those most appropriate for your situation, there are also a range of "techniques" for data analysis – adding, comparing, contrasting, looking at relationships to name a few. The following general steps may help:

- Organize your information
- Sort if needed
- Decide how to analyze (add; compare; note similarities, differences, the unusual)
- Analyze both qualitative and quantitative data
- Integrate
- Ask what the data tells you
- Decide how to distribute and use

Ask yourselves, before you even collect data, "What will we want to know?" Then, analyze the data accordingly once it's been collected. Remember, plan for how you will analyze data before collecting it.

If you have disaggregated data (separated it by group, location, gender, age, etc.) you can learn a lot about how different groups – men and women, for example – may view something. Men and women usually have different perspectives because of different gender roles and therefore may not necessarily focus on or choose the same objectives and indicators. They also might interpret data differently and suggest other changes in the activity.

Remember to disaggregate data during analysis and reaching conclusions as well as during data collection so you will retain differences of experience through to the steps of interpretation and use. Don't lose important differences by summarizing too early.

### *When should we do it?*

Create opportunities for period summary and analysis of data. Don't wait until the end of your grant period. Remember, the main reason for monitoring is to provide you – the key stakeholders in your project – with information you need for strengthened project management. But if your group does not have the information it needs in a timely manner, the monitoring effort may be a waste of resources. Try to have periodic meetings – monthly or weekly and at key decision points in the project – to review progress, celebrate successes, share information, and plan next steps.

### *Who needs the information?*

Your primary project group should be the main users of monitoring information. The larger community of which your group is a part may also be interested in what is happening even though they may not be directly involved. Others who are considering trying a similar project may also be interested. COMPASS is of course interested to hear what's working well and how you've overcome challenges.

There may be other groups or individuals as well who could also use the information. Again, this will vary from project to project and group to group. You and your group need to decide, "Who needs what, when, and where?"

### *What form should the data be in?*

There are many ways to "present" data, as noted below. Just make sure your data is useful and understandable. If you present it in an interesting way you will probably increase the chances of someone actually using the data.

### *When should data be presented?*

You need to present data when it's needed. There is no set formula. You may want to present data monthly, seasonally, or annually depending on the content of the information and the needs and interests of the group receiving the information.

## PROCESS & TOOLS

The following tools will help you and your group to make sense of your data. Remember that you should have regular analysis of your data. Early in your planning your project group should decide <u>what</u> decisions need to be made <u>when</u>. Once your group knows this, they will know when they need to analyze data.

- **Organize and Analyze Your Data**

  With your group, work through the steps outlined in the HOW section (above) of this step.

- **Summary Worksheet**

  Continue to fill out your summary worksheet.

- **Gender Analysis Matrix (GAM)**

  Periodically work with your group to complete the GAM (introduced in Step One) to see what has changed.

- **Formal and Informal Exchange**

  Create formal and informal opportunities for community members to exchange information about what works well and what they would recommend (could be informal and formal meetings as well as exchange visits). You may need to create separate groups for men and women in order to ensure optimal participation of key stakeholders. Use existing committees where possible and appropriate.

- **Data Presentation**

  Work with your group to discuss and explore the following ways to present data in order to choose ones most appropriate for your situation:

  - Orally – stories, plays, role-plays
  - Written – reports, newsletters, case studies
  - Graphics – graphs, charts, maps
  - Pictures – cartoons, photographs

## Key Questions

- What worked well?
- What do we wish had happened?
- What new opportunities have arisen?
- What new resources or "assets" have we discovered?
- Who should receive results of our monitoring?
- In what form should the information be in order to be useful? What form is needed by different groups?
- If we were asked to teach another group to do what we've been doing, what would be our advice?
- Based on what we now know, what should we do differently?
- What have we learned about our monitoring process itself? Do we need to streamline it? What changes could improve it?

## Be careful of…

- Forgetting to PLAN data analysis.  If you do, you may end up with data which you can't analyze or use.

- Forgetting to use data once it's been collected and analyzed.

- Analyzing too late.  If you need certain information by a certain time in order to make certain decisions, make sure you have the data collected, analyzed, and in a form in which it can be used before then.

## LINKS TO COMPASS REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

As outlined in the COMPASS Small Grant Program Manual, grantees need to provide COMPASS with narrative quarterly progress reports.  In addition to providing useful project management information at the local level, monitoring of project indicators will also provide useful information for these quarterly reports.  COMPASS also asks that grantees complete, on a quarterly basis, the Progress Report on Project Indicators Form.  A copy of this form is included in the Small Grants Manual.

# ATTACHMENTS

**One:**

Persons and Organizations Interviewed

**Two:**

Workshop Participants

**Three:**

Useful References

# ATTACHMENT ONE

## Organizations and Persons Contacted

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Mr. Michael Cornelisse

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Mr. Anax Umphawi
Mr. Francis Epulani

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Mr. Robert Kafakoma

Environmental Concern
Mr. Everson Kalinda

Environmental Development and Training Agency (EDETA)
Ms. Pauline Thyanga Thyanga

Evangelical Lutheran Development Programme (ELDP)
Mr. James Chima

Malawi Agroforestry Extension Project (MAFEP)
Dr. Trent Bunderson
Mr. Iain Hayes

Michiru Conservation Area
Mr. Charles Mkoka

Training Support Programme in Community Based Natural Resource Management
Mr. Wouter Hijweege

Wildlife Society of Malawi
Mr. Daulos Mauambeta
Mr. William Chadza

# ATTACHMENT TWO

**WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS**

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Eliams Banda, Bookkeeper and Accountant
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Lizzie Ndhlovu, Administrative Assistant
Anax Umphawi, Deputy Chief of Party
Andrew Watson, Chief of Party

# ATTACHMENT THREE

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